

Star Wars goes rogue with a treat for action fans

Film Kate Muir

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story

★★★★★

There are two damn fine performances in the Star Wars prequel *Rogue One*: the first is Felicity Jones as the maverick rebel fighter Jyn Erso, and the second is the new droid, K-2SO: a dry, mildly resentful, patrician robot who is in the habit of blurting out exactly what's on his circuits. Towering like a stick-man over the rest of the cast, K-2SO provides most of the laughs in this portentous voyage into that same old galaxy far, far away.

The director of this latest Star Wars spin-off is Gareth Edwards, who cut his fangs on the creature-features *Monsters* and *Godzilla*. He handles the George Lucas legacy with care, playing both to the traditionalists who will be overjoyed with the red-eyed reappearance of Darth Vader (rasped, as in the original, by James Earl Jones, now 85), and to the new generation, rolling with a multiracial cast and a second kick-ass female protagonist following Rey in last year's *The Force Awakens*.

While *Rogue One* does not quite have the grandeur or



Felicity Jones as Jyn Erso, left, tackles the action with aplomb as she takes on the stormtroopers of the Empire in this entertaining Star Wars prequel

nostalgic impact of *The Force Awakens*, it does have the usual daddy issues that plague the series' protagonists. Set just before the events of the original 1977 film, the story opens on an isolated volcanic beach with

Jyn as a little girl watching in horror as her father Galen Erso (Mads Mikkelsen) is captured by the Galactic Empire's latest lunatic military man, the weapons director Orson Krennic — a sweaty, manic, sibilant Ben Mendelsohn. The Empire is keen to force Erso to finish his splendid scientific work on the Death Star, and the set-up is taken from the yellow-lettered crawl from the first movie: "Rebel spaceships ... have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to the Empire's ultimate weapon, the Death Star."

So with the spoilers on screen long ago, the interest lies now in precisely how *Rogue One*'s motley crew gather

to steal the plans, and in watching Jyn grow in stature from disillusioned prisoner to rebel leader, against her own expectations. Jones handles the action with aplomb — there is no lolling about in a Carrie Fisher gold bikini here — but instead hand-to-hand combat, blaster battles, and perilous leaps into the unknown.

The orphaned Jyn was raised by Saw Gerrera, a one-man rebel force played by Forest Whitaker in such a state of postwar decay that he has steel legs and a creepy oxygen mask. (There is a scene at his HQ with a tentacled, jelly-dripping, pachydermic creature during which you may wish to cover your child's eyes.) As Jyn locates Gerrera, the rest of the rebels come together: Cassian Andor (Diego Luna), an orphan fighter with much, it turns out, in common with Jyn; Cassian's droid K-2SO; the goofy-but-brave pilot Bodhi Rook (Riz Ahmed, with ponytail and goggles), and the martial arts actor Donnie Yen playing a blind ninja.

Plenty of explosive action and spaceship canyon-riding then occurs, though occasionally the special effects are clunky, perhaps a nod to the original aesthetic. In all, a solid Star Wars effort, and no doubt the force will be with international sales. *Rogue One* is released in the UK on December 15



Big Brexit decisions delayed until next year amid cabinet squabbles

Sam Coates Deputy Political Editor

All important decisions on Brexit have been deferred until next year amid reports that members of a key cabinet committee are struggling to reach agreement.

Theresa May is determined to follow a formal policy development process, using committees set up shortly after her arrival in Downing Street rather than the more informal group preferred by David Cameron.

Decisions are expected to start being made before Article 50 is triggered in March, although some issues such as the customs union may be deferred beyond then.

Significant power over Brexit is held by the European Union Exit and Trade committee, which has 12 permanent members and is chaired by the prime minister. The committee meets fortnightly and typically discusses two approximately 80-page documents, such as details of World Trade Organisation rules and agricultural subsidies.

Mrs May is keen to shift policy development from the civil service to cabinet

committees, making them a more important feature of her style of government. One person involved says: "She will start a meeting and turn to David Davis and ask him to introduce his paper. Everyone chips in, the PM sums up and everyone staggers out saying how difficult it is."

A senior government figure was critical of the process: "If you could see it you would be depressed by the quality of the contributions in cabinet."

"Philip Hammond is the only one that makes sense. All the rest spent a good deal of time praising the secretary of state for DexEU [Mr Davis, whose department takes the lead in most cabinet committee papers] for his frankly poor quality papers or the Brexiteers saying it's going to be a success."

They added that some participants repeatedly state that German car-makers and other industries will ensure the EU gives Britain a good deal.

Mrs May's summaries typically give little indication of future decision-making and usually involve a request for more information from key topics.

Boris Johnson, the foreign secretary,



Philip Hammond has been described as "the only one that makes sense"

has so far "said very little" in the debates. One source added: "He appears to be adopting an 'I'm only going to care when it matters' approach."

Mr Johnson was embarrassed recently when he suggested the group should discuss a particular paper. Mr Hammond, who is not known in Whitehall for his fondness for the foreign secretary, pointed out they had discussed the paper a month before.

Liam Fox gives "expansive" updates about world events on things that "you

wouldn't necessarily know". Andrea Leadsom, the environment secretary, gets "quite irritated" when three people in a row say Brexit is quite difficult and "puts them right". In wider cabinet, Mrs Leadsom's contributions have been noted for repeated references to postnatal depression and the importance of a child's first 1,000 days.

Meanwhile, a leading think-tank has warned that Mrs May's secrecy is undermining preparations for Brexit. The Institute for Government said that Whitehall departments do not know what to do before Article 50 is activated because Mrs May is keeping too many details "under wraps".

• A House of Lords report is expected to warn tomorrow that tens of thousands of banking jobs could be lost to continental Europe before Brexit even happens if no transitional deal is agreed at the start of the process.

The report, from the EU financial affairs committee, concludes that most financial institutions will have to make decisions on relocating staff before any deal is struck to prevent a "cliff edge" if no agreement can be reached.

Mozart beats Beyoncé to top music charts

Jack Malvern Arts Correspondent

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart lacks the edginess of Drake or the sexiness of Beyoncé, but his death 225 years ago has proven no obstacle to becoming the bestselling artist of the year.

The 18th-century Austrian composer used none of the usual promotional tricks of fellow musicians at the top of the CD sales chart. He has managed to shift 1.25 million copies without going on tour, appearing in public, tweeting his personal life or even stirring in his grave at St Marx cemetery in Vienna.

If sceptics are wondering whether the figure is too good to be true, then they are right. Mozart owes his success to the release of a box-set, *Mozart 225: The New Complete Edition*, which contains 200 CDs. It costs more than £300 and has sold just 6,250 copies but Billboard magazine, which compiles the chart, multiplies the sales of an album by its size, pushing it to the top.

Paul Moseley, of Universal Music, said: "Mozart's melodies are in some way part of all our lives. His chart position means that he is now also likely to be the answer to pub quiz questions."